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INDEX:

- (1) Japanese Ambassador to the US Kato: US House of Representatives resolution on the wartime comfort women "is not helpful to the Japan-US relationship"
- (2) Chief cabinet secretary rebuts US newspaper for criticism of prime minister
- (3) Advice to Prime Minister Abe by Yoshiko Sakurai: He should state that "Kono statement was mistaken"
- (4) Editorial: Comfort women issue-Kono statement must be inherited
- (5) Futenma alternative: Gov't likely to ask for Okinawa governor's permit next week for sea access
- (6) Matsuoka office's huge utility expenses remain a mystery

ARTICLES:

- (1) Japanese Ambassador to the US Kato: US House of Representatives resolution on the wartime comfort women "is not helpful to the Japan-US relationship"

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
Eve., March 8, 2007

Hiroshi Maruya in Washington

In a press conference on March 7, Ambassador the US Ryozi Kato commented on the resolution submitted to the House of Representatives that demand the Japanese government apologize for the so-called comfort-women problem that was caused by the former Imperial Japanese Army. He stressed: "In objective terms, since the resolution is not based on accurate facts, if it happens to be adopted, it would have an ill-effect on Japan-US relations. It would not be helpful." On the statement by Prime Minister Abe that even if the resolution were passed, he "would not apologize," Kato took the view that "his stance was only natural."

Ambassador Kato then explained that there was much documentation on record, such as 1) the Japanese government admitted its responsibility for the so-called wartime comfort women issue and apologized for it; and 2) It created an Asian Women's Fund and implemented various projects to help the former comfort women. He pointed out that the contents of the House resolution contradicted the truth.

(2) Chief cabinet secretary rebuts US newspaper for criticism of prime minister

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
Eve., March 8, 2007

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki at his press conference this morning rebutted the New York Times and other US newspapers for their criticism of the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's response to the wartime comfort woman issue, saying, "The Prime Minister's statement was not accurately understood in the report." He also revealed that the government was considering requesting the newspaper to run its rebuttal.

TOKYO 00001000 002 OF 007

(3) Advice to Prime Minister Abe by Yoshiko Sakurai: He should state that "Kono statement was mistaken"

SANKEI (Page 3) (Almost full)
March 8, 2007

Countries that fall down on foreign affairs will fall. This is what I feel strongly now in connection with the issue of "comfort women."

I deem now is the time for Japan to face up to the "facts" of the comfort women issue with sincerity in order to avoid cases of diplomatic failure bringing disgrace on our country's honor and withering the spirits of the Japanese people.

Take the resolution now under debate in the US House of Representatives seeking Japan's apology. The resolution concludes that 200,000 women "were forced by the former Imperial Japanese Army into sex slavery" for a period extending from the 1930s. Japan is indeed on the verge of the congress of its ally wrongly labeling it as a disgraceful nation.

Three women testified at a US House hearing on Feb. 15. One of the women, a South Korean, said that when she was 16 in 1944, she joined her friend to run away from home before dawn one day and followed a Japanese man in civilian clothes. Taking a train and then a ship, she, along with the man, arrived at Taiwan, where she realized the man was the owner of a wartime brothel. The man tortured her with electric shocks and beat her with telephone equipment after binding her with telephone wires. She was forced to work as a prostitute but she said, "I was never been paid not even once."

If her story is true, this treatment was a hateful act, and I cannot help sympathizing with her.

But I wonder whether her testimony had any link to abduction and coercion by the Japanese government and its military. As she revealed, she, along with her friend, left home. The man who brought them to Taiwan was later found to be the owner of a brothel. It is crystal clear that the Imperial Japanese Army and the Japanese government had nothing to with their having gone to Taiwan, so was

there no government coercion.

Nonetheless, Representative Honda and other legislators have condemned Japan without examining the facts. Mindy Kotler, who has been engaged in the postwar compensation issue, also treated the comfort women issue in the same way as the Holocaust and denounced Japan, arguing that Japan "should stop bringing disgrace on the honor of the Japan-US alliance" by denying "coercion".

These women's testimony gave rise to doubts even in South Korea in the past.

Ahn Byung Jik, professor at Seoul National University who took part in a survey in February 1993 by the South Korean Council on the Issue of Volunteer Corps/Council to Study the Volunteer Corps, commented (in the book, Yami ni Idomu (Challenge to the darkness), authored by Tsutomu Nishioka, a Korea expert in Japan, and published by Tokuma Shoten):

"It was not uncommon that witnesses' statements lacked coherence with contradictions between the first story and the story that followed"; "In some cases, I felt witnesses deliberately bent the

TOKYO 00001000 003 OF 007

facts"; and, "There were cases where we had to suspend the investigation"

That year, Japan's administration led by Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa made a concerted effort to carry out investigations, but it was unable to spot any facts supporting the charge of coercion. As the next step, the administration had examined testimony by 16 women in compliance with the strong request by the South Korean government, but no questions were allowed, not to mention carrying out investigations to prove the testimony. All relevant documents are closed to the public even now. Despite that, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono released a statement, in which he acknowledged

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as is widely known that there was the fact of "forcing women to work in wartime brothels".

Afterwards, then Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobuo Ishihara reiterated that despite the lack of facts, the Japanese government admitted "coercion" partly because of restoring women's honor and complying with South Korea's strong request.

It is easy now to ask why Japan acknowledged such acts without any grounds and why Japan did not fight against the issue. But at the time, raising such questions would only provoke harsh criticism at home and abroad. The Japanese people lacked mental toughness and logical consistency necessary for them to advocate what they think is true amid a storm of criticism. Japanese diplomacy has lacked courage to face up to the facts with sincerity and assert its views from a long perspective, instead of always easily conceding with the reality it faced.

This tendency is found even in the present-day Japanese diplomacy. There is a group of people who are trying to turn a blind eye to errors found in the US House resolution as well as the Kono statement so as to deal with the matter within the framework of the Kono statement. Japanese Ambassador to the US Ryozo Kato explained in a letter addressed to the US House of Representatives that the Japanese government has repeatedly made an apology, but he has failed to cite the factual errors.

Even Michael Green, a pro-Japanese American who formerly served as senior director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council (NSC), commented that even though Japan may argue there was no "coercion," "Japan cannot win the argument" (Yomiuri Shimbun, morning edition of March 4).

In order to block the adoption of the House resolution, an immediate crisis for Japan, it may be wise to continue to emphasize that Japan has profusely offered apologies. But what do you think will happen next? The dishonor of Japan would be only engraved more deeply and heavily in history.

Under present-day values, the idea of military brothels is unacceptable. We must not repeat such inhumane acts and systems to exist. At the same time, we must assert that wartime brothels reflected the values of the times. Not only Japan but also other countries had similar brothels. Even after World War II, other countries in this world established a similar system.

Nonetheless, however, why has only Japan become the focus of criticism? Because other countries deem that there was "coercion by the former Imperial Japanese Army and the Japanese government. But the fact is that coercion never existed. The Kono statement made a clear mistake. If Japan fails to claim this point, the issue will

TOKYO 00001000 004 OF 007

not be essentially resolved. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is trying to focus his attention on the heart of the matter. In this regard, I strongly stand by the prime minister's courageous attitude.

(4) Editorial: Comfort women issue-Kono statement must be inherited

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
March 8, 2007

There is a rise of arguments from among the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's lawmakers, calling for the government to review its 1993 statement that came from then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono and that owned up to the Imperial Japanese Army's roles over the so-called comfort women. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has vowed to inherit this Kono statement. However, the prime minister said there was nothing to endorse coercion that was defined at first. This remark was taken as subscribing to the advocacy of revising the Kono statement, and it triggered concerns among Japan's neighbors, such as China and South Korea.

Meanwhile, a US congressional resolution, which regards the Kono statement as insufficient and demands an official apology from Japan, is now before the House of Representatives.

Prime Minister Abe visited China and South Korea shortly after coming into office to resume discontinued summit diplomacy with the two countries. Those LDP lawmakers' call for retouching the Kono statement could damage considerably Japan's improved relations with its neighbors. It's only natural that Prime Minister Abe declared his intention to take over the Kono statement.

Former South Korean comfort women instituted lawsuits against the Japanese government for compensation. Then Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's cabinet conducted fact-finding surveys and released the Kono statement based on findings from those surveys. The Japanese government formally admitted to the Imperial Japanese Army's direct and indirect roles in setting up brothels and transporting comfort women. The Japanese government then expressed its "sincere apologies and remorse."

In the LDP, however, a group of lawmakers thinking over Japan's future and history education voiced strong calls for a review of the Kono statement on the grounds that there is no evidence to back claims that the Japanese military and government authorities used coercion to force the women into brothels as comfort women. Such a move could be seen as a trend of Japan's rightward tilt, following former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine.

The Kono statement was not the only form for Japan's apologies to former comfort women. In 1995, the Asian Women's Fund was set up. The fund delivered private contributions in the form of consolation to former comfort women with a letter of apology signed by the prime minister. However, it is also true that former comfort women in South Korea and other countries refused the prime minister's letter, claiming that the letter incorporated no legal responsibilities.

It's possible to say that the Kono statement was a political settlement. LDP people insisting on a review of the Kono statement cite the government's discovery of no strict evidence with historical endorsement as a reason for their advocacy of revising

the Kono statement. However, it is unavoidable for any political settlement on an issue of this sort, which involves war

TOKYO 00001000 005 OF 007

responsibilities, to leave some parts ambiguous. If they would try to contend the facts of history, the best way is for them to ask historians. Japan and China, which have squared off with each other time and again over history in their respective perceptions, have set up a joint study committee, which is made up of 10 scholars from both countries.

If politicians bring up something imprudently, things get entangled in many cases, as seen from the advocacy of revising the Kono statement. Politicians should first consider Japan's national interests from a long-term perspective. They must strictly abstain from stirring up unhealthy nationalism.

It is clear what Prime Minister Abe and other Japanese politicians should do. They should carefully recount the standpoint of Japan, which has offered its apologies over the comfort women issue, in order to prevent the US congressional resolution from passing the US House of Representatives and in order to wipe away the concerns of Japan's neighbors. Prime Minister Abe upholds "asserting diplomacy." However, the outcome of asserting must meet Japan's national interests.

(5) Futenma alternative: Gov't likely to ask for Okinawa governor's permit next week for sea access

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 1) (Abridged)
March 8, 2007

In connection with the government-planned construction of a new facility in a coastal area of Camp Schwab in Nago City as an alternative for the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station, the Defense Facilities Administration Agency is now coordinating with the Okinawa prefectural government to set about surveys to look into the current state of sea areas, including a fact-finding survey of egg-laying corals, sources revealed. For the surveys, the DFAA is expected ask for Okinawa Prefecture's consent next week to its surveys planned to be implemented in Okinawa Prefecture's public waters off the coast of Camp Schwab, according to the sources. The DFAA's Naha bureau, if the prefectural government's consent is obtained, will select contractors in bidding scheduled for late March and will prepare to carry out sea and other environmental surveys in April and afterward.

"The say they're going to look into a considerably wide range of sea areas," Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima said, "so there's no reason (for the Okinawa prefectural government) to blame it." With this, the governor was flexible about preliminary fact-finding surveys before an environmental assessment.

In its coordination with the DFAA, the Okinawa prefectural government asked the DFAA to set a range of survey areas that can meet Nago City's proposal to build an offshore facility. The DFAA side showed its understanding, so the Okinawa prefectural government seems to have judged that these surveys differ from the one that is premised on the government's alternative airfield plan and that is based on the nation's environmental assessment law.

In addition, the DFAA, when asking Okinawa Prefecture in written form for its consent, will describe "fact-finding surveys to look into the current state of sea areas," instead of describing "environmental fact-finding surveys," in an aim to weaken linkage with a legally mandatory environmental assessment.

TOKYO 00001000 006 OF 007

However, these planned fact-finding surveys are also expected to look into egg-laying corals and seaweed beds.

Even in case these surveys are conducted as preliminary surveys, their results can be reflected in an environmental assessment.

However, Okinawa Prefecture will disclose information about the government's environmental assessment survey for public review and will make a decision with the governor's statement, according to a prefectural government official. "The surveys planned this time are not formal ones under the law and will be implemented by contractors on their own responsibilities and judgment," the official said.

Meanwhile, the DFAA is expected to carefully determine when to disclose information for public review about its law-based environmental assessment survey for Okinawa Prefecture and its municipalities, with an eye to a potential impact on political events, such as a by-election to be officially announced on April 5 for the House of Councillors.

(6) Matsuoka office's huge utility expenses remain a mystery

ASAHI (Page 39) (Abridged)
March 8, 2007

The Asahi Shimbun has found that all the Abe cabinet ministers, advisors to the prime minister, senior vice ministers, and parliamentary secretaries who have their offices in the Dietmembers' Office Buildings did not declare any utilities in their political fund reports for 2005 -- except for one cabinet minister: Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka. The farm minister declared approximately 5.07 million yen as utilities. The figure particularly stands out against the backdrop that utilities in the Dietmembers' Office Buildings are all covered by tax money. Before the Upper House Budget Committee yesterday, Matsuoka simply reiterated that his office has reported its expenses appropriately.

According to the political fund reports and other documents, the Dietmembers' Office Buildings house "main offices" of the fund management organizations of some 20 cabinet ministers and senior vice ministers that total about 70. Of them, nine lawmakers who have their offices only in the Dietmembers' Office Buildings indicated in the Asahi Shimbun interviews that they had not declared an utilities expenses. "I cannot declare utilities because my office exists only in the Dietmembers' Office Building, which does not charge for utilities," one lawmaker said. Similar explanations came from other lawmakers, as well.

The Political Funds Control Law Enforcement Ordinance defines utilities as fees for electricity, gas, water, and instruments for them.

An LDP Lower House lawmaker who had declared no utilities clearly said: "Usually it's not possible for an office located in the Dietmembers' Office Building to spend 5 million yen for utilities."

A secretary to an Upper House lawmaker took this view: "Office expenses might include the bills for water purifiers and humidifiers, but it's not realistic for a single office to consume water totaling 5 million yen."

The fund statements by the remaining 10 lawmakers included 90,000 yen to 1.03 million yen in utilities. Those lawmakers had offices

TOKYO 00001000 007 OF 007

other than in the Dietmembers' Office Buildings, however.

Expenses declared by Matsuoka's fund management organization

Year	Utilities	Office Expenses
2001	6.59 million yen	26.42 million yen
2002	7.79 million yen	24.75 million yen
2003	4.16 million yen	26.32 million yen
2004	5.18 million yen	31.66 million yen
2005	5.07 million yen	33.59 million yen
Total	28.81 million yen	142.75 million yen

Matsuoka uses the word "appropriate" 23 times in Upper House session

In the Upper House Budget Committee session yesterday, farm minister

Matsuoka repeatedly said that his fund management body has reported utilities "appropriately." Matsuoka indicated on March 5 that he would offer detailed explanations after checking facts with his office. Opposition parties accordingly demanded his explanations yesterday, but Matsuoka dodged their demands, saying: "The existing system does not require information disclosure, so I would like to abstain from doing so."

"My fund management organization informed me that it has reported expenses appropriately." In response to questions yesterday from Social Democratic Party member Hirokazu Shiba and Japanese Communist Party lawmaker Satoshi Inoue, Matsuoka used the word "appropriate" 23 times.

Matsuoka replied on March 5: "A water purifier is installed in the office. Office expenses included fees for heating and the like. Taking the Diet floor yesterday, Shiba said: "Water purifiers and heaters should come under equipment and expendables." Inoue grilled Matsuoka, asking: "Utilities by your two offices in Kumamoto ran to 660,000 yen and 380,000 yen, respectively. Utilities by your office in the Dietmembers' Office Building are far greater than those locations. How do you explain that?" But Matsuoka refused to offer a clear explanation.

Some LDP lawmakers had speculated that Matsuoka would weather the storm by blaming the accounting manager. But on March 5, Matsuoka categorically said: "I gave my consent to the figures in the fund reports." Matsuoka can no longer blame his chief accountant.

SCHIEFFER